

## PREDATION OF ANTS BY MOUNTAIN QUAIL IN NEVADA (HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE)<sup>1 2</sup>

William H. Clark<sup>3</sup>, Keith I. Giezentanner<sup>4</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Four mountain quail, *Oreortyx pictus* (Douglas) were collected in northwestern Nevada in October 1972. Three of the quail were found to have fed upon worker ants; each contained a different species. *Formica subpolita* Mayr, *F. neogagates* Emery and *Camponotus* sp. were prey of the mountain quail. Ants formed a significant portion of the diet of these quail.

Ants form a frequent and significant portion of the food of a variety of wildlife. An example of this importance was given by Knowlton, Roberts and Wood (1946) who found that of 108 bird species examined in Utah, 70 species had recognizable ants in their stomachs. Since the ant species in such accounts are seldom listed we present the following.

On 1 October 1972, four Mountain Quail, *Oreortyx pictus* (Douglas) were collected on Dogskin Mountain, T24N, R19E, S35, Latitude 39°55' N, Longitude 119°49' W, Washoe County, Nevada, at an elevation of 2073 m (6800'). Examination of the crops of these birds revealed that three of the four had consumed worker ants.

Table 1 lists the occurrence of ants and plant fragments found in the crops of the Mountain Quail. Quail #1 ingested 18 individuals of *Formica subpolita* Mayr; Quail #2, 21 individuals of *F. neogagates* Emery; Quail #3, 1 individual of *Camponotus* sp. (minor worker); and Quail #4, no ants. In the three quail containing ants, only one species of ant was found per bird. It appears that the quail fed near ant concentrations such as nests or foraging concentrations. Once such a concentration was found by the quail it was evidently exploited. All of the Mountain Quail had ingested unidentifiable fragments of vegetation.

The ant species involved are known to inhabit mountain regions (Creighton, 1950; Wheeler and Wheeler, 1973). La Rivers (1968) has reported the ants from Nevada. It is possible that these, as well as other mountain

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Biology, College of Idaho, Caldwell, Idaho 83605.

<sup>4</sup> New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, State Capitol, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503.

inhabiting ants, form a significant portion of the diet of *Oreortyx pictus*. Larrison, Tucker and Jollie (1967) state that the Mountain Quail diet in Idaho consists mainly of plant material with a small amount of animal food. Martin, Zim and Nelson (1961) report that animal food is minor in the Mountain Quail diet but that it consists chiefly of ants.

Voucher specimens of the ants are in the collection of Clark as follows: WHC #419 *Formica subpolita*; WHC #420 *Formica neogagates*; and WHC #421 *Camponotus* sp.

Table 1. Food items of four Mountain Quail, *Oreortyx pictus*, in Washoe County, Nevada, 1 October 1972.

FOOD ITEMS INJESTED				
Quail No.	<i>Formica subpolita</i>	<i>F. neogagates</i>	<i>Camponotus</i>	vegetation
1	18	0	0	present
2	0	21	0	present
3	0	0	1	present
4	0	0	0	present

Ants injested were all workers.

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